Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh
New Series Volume 15 Number 4 April 2018

**FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 15th April 2018: Nehru Zoological Park, 6.30AM.**

Established in October 1959 and opened to the public in October 1963, the 380-acre Zoo, located adjacent to the Mir Alam Tank, offers its denizens a variety of habitats, including patches of forest, a water body, grassland, etc. Not surprisingly, the zoo has usually yielded a good selection of bird sightings. The various enclosures hold a lot of small ground and tree birds, as well as a number of water birds. Eurasian Thick-knees have been known to breed near the Sambhar enclosure. There have been several interesting sightings and observations in the past, and this trip should be no exception. This will be a half-day trip. Carry snacks and water as usual. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Ms Surekha Aitabathula (99490-38532).

**INDOOR MEETING: Friday, 13th April 2018, 6.30PM: TALK BY M.S. RAM: IMPACT OF FOREST FRAGMENTATION ON THE ENDANGERED LION-TAILED MACAQUE**

MS Ram is pursuing his PhD at the Laboratory for the Conservation of Endangered Species, CCMB. He will enlighten us on how habitat fragmentation is one of the leading causes of species extinction and biodiversity loss in forests.

## THE KASHMIR OF ANDHRA PRADESH
## Trip Report – Lambasingi, October 2017

Text and Photos: Sita Susarla

**Lambasingi**

On a pleasant October morning we set out on a visit to Lambasingi, a village in the Eastern Ghats located at a distance of 100km from the coastal city of Visakhapatnam and 3000 feet above sea level.

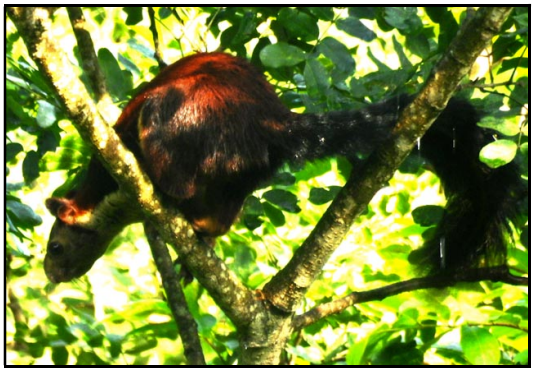
A picturesque location surrounded by hills and green pastures, the hamlet had witnessed snowfall in January 2012 – hence the nickname 'Kashmir of Andhra Pradesh'.

We started off quite early from Visakhapatnam and stopped for breakfast at Narsipatnam, a town that is located at a distance of 30km from Lambasingi and 70km from Visakhapatnam.

In the nearby rice fields, we spotted a Tawny Pipit (*Anthus campestris*), a Paddyfield Pipit (*Anthus rufulus*), two Black-winged Kites (*Elanus caeruleus*), some Cattle (*Bubulcus ibis*) and Little Egrets (*Egretta garzetta*) and a couple of Black Drongos (*Dicrurus macrocerus*).

**Narsipatnam**

After a quick breakfast we began the climb to Lambasingi.



**Malabar Giant Squirrel**

We stopped at some very beautiful viewpoints during our climb. At one of these points we sighted a Malabar Giant Squirrel very actively feeding on the forest fruit and seed. As we moved further up a juvenile Crested Serpent Eagle (*Spilornis cheela*) crossed our path and perched on the branches of a nearby tree. It looked very majestic with the thick foliage spread all around. It is known to feed mainly on snakes and lizards and, therefore, the name.

**Crested Serpent Eagle (juvenile)**

While scanning the trees for birds we chanced upon a wood-coloured Gecko. The camouflage was amazing.

**Gecko**

After about an hour of climbing we reached the Lambasingi village. The calls of Common Ioras (*Aegithina tiphia*) reverberated across the meadows. As we moved through the meadows and hills that were partly hidden by descending clouds, we spotted Green Bee-eaters (*Merops orientalis*), Oriental White-eyes (*Zosterops palpebrosus*) and Drongos.

**Tricolor Shrike**

The Tricolor or Black-headed Shrike (*Lanius schach tricolor*), a subspecies of the Long-tailed Shrike (*Lanius schach*), was sighted at many places in the village.

**Black-winged Kite**

There were also many Black-winged Kites hovering and flickering the tail without any sidewise movement. A Grey Wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*) and a few White-browed Wagtails (*Motacilla maderaspatensis*) were seen by the side of a nearby stream of water.

**Grey Wagtail**

After a quick lunch under the shade of a tree we resumed birding. A Paddyfield Pipit was seen hopping around and the metallic *tuk tuk* sound of the Coppersmith Barbet (*Megalaima haemacephala*) with occasional song of the Asian Koel (*Eudynamys scolopaceus*) filled the air. As we prepared for the climb down we sighted many Spotted Doves (*Stigmatopelia chinensis*) along with small Green Bee-eaters sitting on cable lines.

We had planned to visit Paderu also, but the darkening skies and imminent rain forced us to wind up for the day. As we climbed down the thundershowers increased, but this did not deter us from stopping to buy a few smoked corn *bhuttas*.

At Narsipatnam the sky cleared and we stopped by a paddy field once again. Here we saw some Common Sandpipers (*Actitis hypoleucos*), Cormorants and Scaly-breasted Munias (*Lonchura punctulata*). All in all, it was a great trip.

Complete list of birds seen at Lambasingi:

| Sl. No. | Common Name | Scientific Name | Sl. No. | Common Name | Scientific Name |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Little Cormorant | *Phalacrocorax niger* | 21 | Rose-ringed Parakeet | *Psittacula krameri* |
| 2 | Indian Cormorant | *Phalacrocorax fuscicollis* | 22 | Common Iora | *Aegithina tiphia* |
| 3 | Purple Heron | *Ardea purpurea* | 23 | Tricolor shrike | *Lanius schach tricolor* |
| 4 | Cattle Egret | *Bubulcus ibis* | 24 | Black Drongo | *Dicrurus macrocercus* |
| 5 | Indian Pond Heron | *Ardeola grayii* | 25 | White-bellied Drongo | *Dicrurus caerulescens* |
| 6 | Red-naped Ibis | *Pseudibis papillosa* | 26 | Rufous Treepie | *Dendrocitta vagabunda* |
| 7 | Black-winged Kite | *Elanus caeruleus* | 27 | House Crow | *Corvus splendens* |
| 8 | Crested Serpent Eagle | *Spilornis cheela* | 28 | Red-vented Bulbul | *Pycnonotus cafer* |
| 9 | Black Kite | *Milvus migrans* | 29 | Ashy Prinia | *Prinia socialis* |
| 10 | Yellow-wattled Lapwing | *Vanellus malabaricus* | 30 | Oriental White-eye | *Zosterops palpebrosus* |
| 11 | Red-wattled Lapwing | *Vanellus indicus* | 31 | Jungle Babbler | *Turdoides striata* |
| 12 | Rock Pigeon | *Columba livia* | 32 | Indian Robin | *Saxicoloides fulicatus* |
| 13 | Spotted Dove | *Spilopelia chinensis* | 33 | Oriental Magpie Robin | *Copsychus saularis* |
| 14 | Greater Coucal | *Centropus sinensis* | 34 | Common Myna | *Acridotheres tristis* |
| 15 | Asian Koel | *Eudynamys scolopaceus* | 35 | Purple Sunbird | *Cinnyris asiaticus* |
| 16 | Spotted Owlet | *Athene brama* | 36 | Grey Wagtail | *Motacilla cinerea* |
| 17 | White-throated Kingfisher | *Halcyon smyrnensis* | 37 | Paddyfield Pipit | *Anthus rufulus* |
| 18 | Indian Roller | *Coracias benghalensis* | 38 | Tawny Pipit | *Anthus campestris* |
| 19 | Coppersmith Barbet | *Psilopogon haemacephalus* | 39 | House Sparrow | *Passer domesticus* |
| 20 | Brown-headed Barbet | *Psilopogon zeylanicus* | 40 | Green Bee-eater | *Merops orientalis* |

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# Trip Report – Khichan Bird Sanctuary

Text and Photos: Ajit Kumar Mahendra

**Demoiselle Cranes**

While planning a trip to Jodhpur recently, I looked up Lonely Planet to see if there were any good birding sites in and around Jodhpur. I came across a paragraph describing the famous Demoiselle Crane wintering spot 140 kms NW of Jodhpur near Khichan, a small village, and decided to include it in our itinerary.

Reaching there, we drove down the well-maintained state highway and reached our destination in about 3 hours. On the way we passed Osium, a town located at the edge of the Thar desert that serves as a hub for desert safaris. The drive through the semi-arid terrain was pleasant. One could just experience the desert landscape. En route, we saw a stray Spotted Deer grazing on the sparse vegetation.

The taxi drove right to the pond where the cranes gather in large numbers to quench their thirst and just relax or bask in the sun. The villagers have built a platform which reaches into the pond. We could see and photograph the cranes at close quarters.

The birds were quite comfortable with human company, including a group of noisy kids who joined us out of curiosity. I was so thrilled by the sight of these pretty birds in such large numbers that I captured a few pictures on my mobile and sent them to Shafaatbhai instantly. I wondered how such a large flock could feed in a barren desert. The kids informed me that they fed these birds millets first thing in the morning.

As per Lonely Planet, 2007, these birds are fed 600 kg of millets per day twice a day. The secret of such a large flock of birds making Khichan their winter home is the human factor – a rare case of human-animal co-existence.

On scanning the Internet, more details came to light. The villagers have integrated these avian species into their lives. Some of the songs and legends of the village are about *kuraj*, the local name for these cranes. Ratanlal, a villager, said that some families even named their children *kuraj*. He recalls feeding these birds as a young boy before migrating to Mumbai in search of a livelihood. Fate brought him back after 20 years. Now, he organises the daily feeding activity. Because of an assured source of food, the number of birds is increasing every year and so is the expenditure. The villagers depend on donations, so during the off season, Ratanlal travels to Mumbai to collect funds to feed these birds.

This small village has become quite an attraction. When Shalini and I were driving in, we saw a bus load of tourists coming out after watching the birds. Later two satellite TV broadcasting vans were spotted, probably to shoot a video on this wonderful example of symbiosis. It was a wonderful experience.

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# Bird of the Month

Umesh Mani

## Eurasian Curlew (*Numenius arquata*)

**Eurasian Curlew** (Pulicat, December 24, 2017)

Order: Charadriiformes
Family: Scolopacidae
Genus: *Numenius*
Species: *N. arquata*
Size: 50-60 cm

Description & distribution: Also known as the European, Common or Western Curlew, or as the Whaup (in Scots), the Eurasian Curlew is a large wader of the family Scolopacidae. It breeds across temperate regions of Europe and Asia, like the United Kingdom, Scandinavia, Russia, Kazakhstan, northern Mongolia and north-eastern China, and is the most widespread of the curlews. It is a winter visitor to the coastal regions in Africa, the Mediterranean, the Middle East, the Indian subcontinent, south-east Asia, south-eastern China, Taiwan Japan and South Korea. It is, however, seen throughout the year in milder parts of the United Kingdom. Vagrant birds have been observed far from its normal range, like the USA, Canada, Norway, Denmark, New Zealand and the Bahamas.

The overall plumage of the bird is greyish-brown. The breeding adult has an indistinct supercilium on a pale buff-brown head, neck and upper mantle, with the head and neck being streaked blackish and the mantle showing dark spots and weak bars. The lower back and rump are whitish, and the white tail has dark brown barring. The underparts are lighter, the breast being heavily streaked, and the belly, vent and undertail coverts are whiter with fine streaking. Underwings are white with variable streaking or spotting. Its irises are blackish, and legs and feet are bluish grey. However, the most distinctive feature of the Eurasian Curlew is the very long, smoothly downcurved bill, which is dark with a pale pinkish base to the lower mandible. The only other bird with a similar bill is the Whimbrel, which is smaller, and the bill is shorter and straighter with a kink, unlike the smooth curve of the Curlew. The non-breeding bird is greyer, lacking the buff on the head. The sexes are similar, with the female being bigger and having a slightly longer bill. In flight, its toes extend beyond the tail. The juvenile is more buff on the breast, and the upperparts have some buff streaking and fringes.

Habitat & behaviour: Outside the breeding season, the Eurasian Curlew is a highly gregarious species. It is usually seen on the edges of water-bodies like lakes and *jheels*, flooded agricultural lands, and around cultivated areas, and feeds by probing the wet mud with its long bill while walking along slowly. Due to the differing bill lengths, the males and females forage in different areas. It feeds mainly on small invertebrates, crabs, earthworms, molluscs, spiders, grasshoppers, crickets, lizards, amphibians, and small rodents and fish. It is a skittish bird and moves away on human approach. The call is a loud, rising *curloo-oo*, while the song consists of a series of long, trilled, bubbling phrases, which is also heard in winter and on passage.

Nesting: The Eurasian Curlew is monogamous and territorial, and the male performs aerial displays while enticing the female. It usually breeds between April and July. The nest is a shallow scrape on dry open ground or in the cover of grass or sedge. The usual clutch consists of 8-12 buff-coloured eggs with brown blotches. Both parents share incubation duties.

Local name: The Eurasian Curlew is known as *'Goar'*, *'Gounch'* or *'Bada gulinda'* in Hindi, '*Karloo*' in Punjabi, *'Kuthirai malai kottan'* in Tamil and *'Valkokku'* in Malayalam.

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**For Private Circulation Only**
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